

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DUBLIN 01255 171154Z
ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 01255

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, EI, UK
SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO MASON'S APRIL 13 STATEMENTS

REF: (A) LONDON 5743, (B) LONDON 5899, (C) DUBLIN 1209

1. IRISH NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN UNIFORMLY CRITICAL OF UK
NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY MASON'S REMARKS IN COMMONS
APRIL 13, PARTICULARLY MASON'S APPARENT STATEMENT THAT
NO MASON-O'KENNEDY MEETING WAS IN THE OFFING AND HIS
CRITICISM OF PARTIES IN THE REPUBLIC ADVOCATING UNITY.
THE IRISH TIMES, IN AN ARTICLE HEADED "MASON'S RELUC-
TANCE TO MEET O'KENNEDY SETS BACK RELATIONS," SAID THAT
MASON'S STATEMENTS IN COMMONS "CAUSED SURPRISE AND NOT
A LITTLE ANNOYANCE IN DUBLIN LAST NIGHT.

2. THE IRISH TIMES ELABORATED: "MR. MASON'S OPINION
AND THE GENERAL TONE OF THE BRIEF DEBATE IN THE BRITISH
HOUSE OF COMMONS ON ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS HAVE AGAIN
DISTURBED THE REASSURING ATMOSPHERE PRODUCED BY THE
MEETING IN COPENHAGEN BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH, MR. LYNCH,
AND THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, MR. CALLAGHAN.

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PAGE 02 DUBLIN 01255 171154Z

" THAT DISCUSSION LASTED 50 MINUTES, AFTER WHICH IRISH
OFFICIALS CLEARLY SUGGESTED THAT THE WAY WAS NOW OPEN
FOR A MEETING BETWEEN MR. MASON AND MR. O'KENNEDY WITH
ECONOMIC COOPERATION, POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY
ON THE AGENDA.

"THE MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND THE PRIME MINISTER

HOWEVER, HAD BEEN PREFACED BY BRITISH EFFORTS TO PLAY DOWN ITS IMPORTANCE WITH ACCUSATIONS THAT DUBLIN WAS ATTEMPTING TO SUGGEST A CONFRONTATION, AND WAS FOLLOWED BY REPORTS THAT IT HAD BEEN CONCERNED PRINCIPALLY WITH SECURITY.

" MR. MASON'S DESCRIPTION OF THE MEETING AS BRIEF, INFORMAL AND POLITE FOLLOWED THE LINE CONSISTENTLY ADOPTED BY BRITISH OFFICIALS; HIS VIEW THAT A MEETING WITH MR. O'KENNEDY WAS UNNECESSARY WAS IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION OF DUBLIN'S INTERPRETATION."

3. THE IRISH PRESS TOOK THE SAME TACK: "MASON AND O'KENNEDY NOT TO MEET: THE STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE NORTH, MR. MASON, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS YESTERDAY, THAT A MEETING BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS MR. O'KENNEDY, WAS NOT NOW NECESSARY APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN OFFICIAL CIRCLES IN DUBLIN COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE.

" THE TONE OF THE DEBATE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS YESTERDAY WAS SCARCELY GUARANTEED TO PROMOTE ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY THE INTERVENTION OF CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN MR. AIREV NEAVE. MR. MASON'S DESCRIPTION OF THE MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND MR. CALLAGHAN AS SHORT, INFORMAL AND POLITE WAS AN ODD ACCOUNT OF A CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DUBLIN 01255 171154Z

MEETING THAT LASTED 50 MINUTES AND COVERED ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES."

4. IRISH OFFICIALDOM SO FAR HAVE BEEN NOTABLY SILENT. THIS, HOWEVER, CAN BE ATTRIBUTABLE PROBABLY MORE TO THEIR GENERAL DISPERSAL THAN TO FORBEARANCE. FORNMIN O'KENNEDY AND ALL OF HIS TOP OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN OFF ON AN OFFICIAL TRIP TO YUGOSLAVIA. ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS DONLON HAS BEEN TRAVELING IN THE NORTH, AND PRIME MINISTER LYNCH HAS BEEN OFF POLITICKING AND RELAXING IN CORK. WE DID, HOWEVER, TALK BRIEFLY TO DONLON BY PHONE ON APRIL 13. HE WAS RELUCTANT TO MAKE COMMENTS UNTIL HE HAD SEEN THE FULL TEXT OF THE COMMONS DEBATE. HE SAID THAT HE WAS "GRITTING HIS TEETH" AND KEEPING QUIET, SINCE AT LEAST "ONE SIDE" MUST SHOW SOME RESTRAINT. WE ARE DUE TO TALK TO DONLON UPON HIS RETURN ON APRIL 18.

5. COMMENT: ONE EMBOFF LISTENED TO THE N.I. SHORT DEBATE IN COMMONS, CARRIED LIVE HERE, AND IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE IRISH NEWSPAPERS WERE SLIGHTLY OFF THE MARK IN THEIR INTERPRETATION OF MASON'S REMARKS.

HOWEVER, THEIR REACTION AND FCO'S REMARKS (REFTEL B)
DO INDICATE THE SENSITIVITY ON BOTH SIDES. WHILE
SOPHISTICATED IRISH OBSERVERS LIKE DONLON REALIZE THE
NECESSITIES OF THE BRITISH ELECTORAL SCENE, THE AVERAGE
IRISHMAN IS GETTING THE IMAGE RECENTLY (AT LEAST FROM
HIS NEWSPAPERS) OF MORE THAN USUAL PADDY-BASHING,
ESPECIALLY BY MASON. IT DOES NOT APPEAR FROM HERE
THAT THE LYNCH-CALLAGHAN MEETING HAS SUCCESSFULLY PUT
ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS BACK ON TRACK. SHANNON

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